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ABSTRACT

This document contains two short fictional stories about teenagers who sometimes feel awkward, confused, or lonely. In the first story, a Latino boy is insecure about how he appears to other people. In the second story, an African American girl feels sad and lonely sometimes in spite of her popularity and good looks. In both stories, talking to someone who really listens helps the teenagers to feel good about themselves. Readers are encouraged to think about the stories and to answer a set of short questions at the end of each story. (NB)

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An *Actions for Health* Book

Inside-Out Feelings

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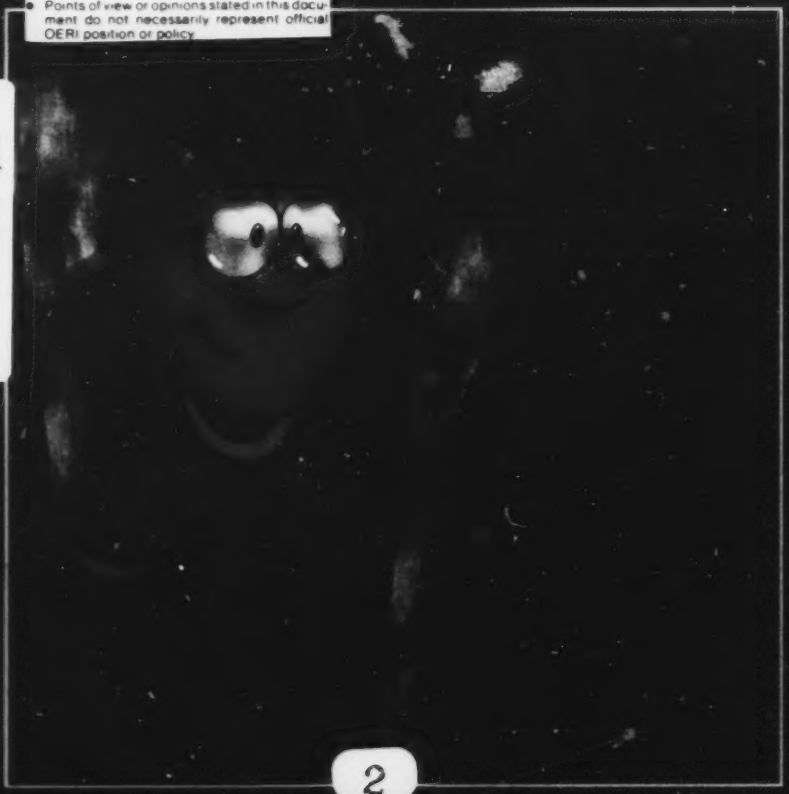

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CONTEMPORARY HEALTH SERIES

Inside-Out Feelings

An *Actions for Health* Book

by ETR Associates

ETR ASSOCIATES
Santa Cruz, California
1994

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ETR Associates (Education, Training and Research) is a nonprofit organization committed to fostering the health, well-being and cultural diversity of individuals, families, schools and communities. The publishing program of ETR Associates provides books and materials that empower young people and adults with the skills to make positive health choices. We invite health professionals to learn more about our high-quality publishing, training and research programs by contacting us at P.O. Box 1830, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1830, 1-800-321-4407.

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Introduction

TJ and Ama have feelings about growing up. TJ is worried about how he looks on the outside. Ama is lonely on the inside, but no one seems to notice. Read their stories and think about any advice you would offer them.

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TJ

TJ had had a busy day at school, then band practice and lots of homework. He really wasn't in the mood for talking, but his cousin Steven was.

Steven was really more like a brother than a cousin. He was over all the time. TJ usually liked to talk to Steven because he was older. The only problem was that sometimes Steven told things too straight!

Telling It Straight

"Hey, TJ," Steven said as he came into TJ's room. "You sure embarrassed me today. You really look dumb sometimes."

TJ felt hurt and a little bit angry. "Don't start on me now, man, I'm tired."

"Sorry, buddy, but this is bad news and you have to listen," Steven said.

"Yeah? What's bugging you?"

"First of all, you kept shuffling and kicking while you were talking to Tamar and Elena at lunch. Then, after school, you couldn't keep up with the rest of the guys on their skateboards. And you nearly ate it when you tried to jump the curb!"

"So what? Big deal." TJ couldn't believe Steven had come over to tell him all the things that were wrong with him.

"Can't you stand still when you're talking? When you keep moving like that, you look really nervous."

"I *was* nervous."

"Well, you don't have to let everybody know. Keep it to yourself. Be cool and don't embarrass me."

I Have Feelings, Too!

Now TJ felt mad. "Thanks, Steven, you're a pal. Is that all you care about, how you look? What about me?"

"What do you mean, what about you?" Steven asked.

"Think about my feelings," TJ said. "I really like girls these days. But I don't know how to act or what to say. So I get nervous. And I'm working on getting good on my skateboard. A guy has to start somewhere. When you tell me I look dumb, I feel really hurt and angry. Maybe I don't need a cousin if that's what you think of me."

"Hey, take it easy. Take it easy, man." Steven looked surprised. "I guess I didn't know what was going on with you. Do you really feel nervous around girls?"

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"Well, think about it, Steven," TJ said. "Here I am, talking to these girls who are taller than I am. They seem so grown up. I worry they're not going to like me because of how I look."

"Listen, buddy, not all girls like boys just for how they look. And there are lots of things to like about you."

"Yeah?"

"Sure. Hey, I like you, even though I get down on you sometimes. And you really play the keyboard well. I like listening to the music you play."

"Really?"

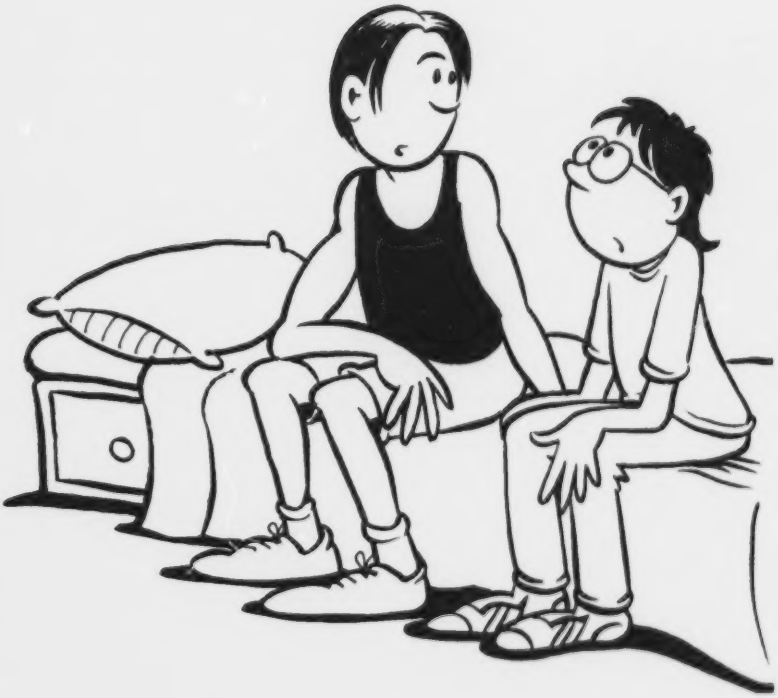
"Really."

"It feels good to hear something positive," TJ said. "I mean, I like playing in the jazz band, and music is great. But I never know if anyone else pays attention, except at the spring concerts."

"Sure, they do," Steven said. "You're fun when you're doing things you know about. Then you don't act dumb."

"Do you think girls would listen if I talked about music or about playing the keyboard?"

"If you talk about something that you know and like, whatever it is, you'll feel more sure of yourself. Then you won't shuffle around as much, and I won't have to look bad," Steven said. TJ laughed.



"There are lots of other things I like about you, too," Steven added. "I know I get down on you because you don't look hot on the skateboard yet. But, you hang in there and work on it."

"Yeah, I wish I were faster. But I have fun and I'll get better."

"You bet," Steven said. "I like talking with you, too, TJ. It took courage to tell me to listen to your feelings. I didn't get what was up with you, but now I understand."

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"Well, it wasn't easy to tell you how I feel. But I didn't like being put down."

"Yeah, I know, man. I'm sorry about that. But it's good that you believed in yourself enough to tell me what you really felt." Then Steven smiled. "I'll tell you a secret, TJ. You aren't the only one who feels like this. The other kids your age are nervous, too—even the girls. They wonder about themselves, just like you. Hey, even I remember feeling the way you feel now. You're OK. Just be yourself and don't let your cousin tell you you're dumb."

TJ grinned. "Thanks, Steven. It was good to talk with you, and I'll try your advice about talking to girls tomorrow. Now I've got to get some sleep."

Think About It

What were TJ's biggest worries? Do you think it helped TJ to tell Steven about his feelings? Why or why not? Do you think other teenagers have these feelings?

Ama

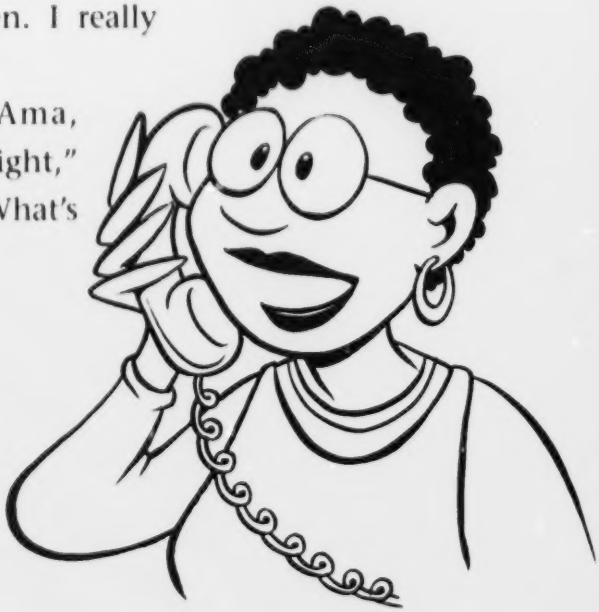
Ama stared at herself in the mirror after she brushed her teeth. She liked what she saw. Her eyes were big and dark. Her hair was curly. Her smile was bright. She knew other people liked the way she looked, too. She always had company at lunch in the cafeteria.

Ama sighed as she put her toothbrush away. She walked by the empty kitchen to her bedroom. Her mother was working late again. It seemed so lonely since her dad had moved out. She got into bed and turned out the light.

Ama lay in bed a long time. But she couldn't fall asleep. Finally she got up and went to the telephone. The only person she could talk to right now was Aunt Joleen. Aunt Joleen was her mom's youngest sister. Young enough to understand things her mom didn't, but old enough to offer good advice. Ama dialed Joleen's number.

"Hi, Joleen. I really need to talk."

"Sure, Ama, I've got all night," Joleen said. "What's up?"



At the Mall

"Wĕll," Ama said, "I was down at the mall on Saturday with Keisha and Annie. We were looking at clothes. I found this T-shirt that my friends said looked really great on me. So I bought it."

"You must have felt good."

"Yeah, I felt good because I knew I looked good. Anyway, then we bought some ice cream cones and went down to the benches by the fountain."

Joleen laughed. "That's where Ben and his friends hang out, isn't it?"

"How did you know?"

"Well, it's pretty obvious to someone who has been to the mall with you many times."

"Oh, yeah, I guess so. We were hoping they'd show up, but nobody mentioned it. We looked at this magazine Annie had bought and ate our cones."

"Did Ben show up?"

"No, but we had a good time anyway, laughing and talking."

"It sounds like you had a good time. You have friends. You look good. You're lucky. What's the problem?"

"I know I'm popular," Ama said. "But there are lots of times when I feel lonely and sad."

"Well, it doesn't show on the outside." Joleen said. "Do you want to tell me more about it?"

"Keisha and Annie are nice, but they aren't close friends. They just want to have fun. One day, I told them that I missed having a family

now that my dad has moved out and my brother has gone off to college. You know what Keisha said?"

"What?"

"She said to stop moping around and come to the movie."

"You must have felt like she didn't listen and didn't care about you."

"Right."

"Maybe she's jealous of you because you're so pretty and popular."

"People think if you're pretty and popular you must be happy. If you tell them you're not, they don't take you seriously."

Ama's Feelings

"Well, I'll take you seriously." Joleen said. "So, tell me, how *do* you feel?"

"Like I said—lonely and sad sometimes. I miss my dad helping me with my homework. I miss everybody being together on holidays. And you know Mom works late to make enough money, so she's not around much." Ama sighed. "But then other times I feel relieved because my parents aren't fighting anymore. I like talking to Mom. And when she has time we have a great time playing tennis together. It's kind of confusing."

"So, what do you do to feel better if you can't talk to your friends or your mom and I'm not around?" Joleen asked.

"Well, I have that diary you gave me. Sometimes I write about my feelings."

"Does it help?"

"Yeah. Somehow, when I write everything down, I feel better. It's as if I unload all my feelings on the paper and then they don't drag me down as much."

"That sounds important. I'm glad the diary helps."

Someone to Talk To

"Talking to you helps, too, Joleen. I know I can trust you. I don't have to worry about what you'll think or who you'll tell. I can show you a part of me that people don't see very often."

"You can always talk to me, Ama," Joleen said. "I remember what it was like to be your age. I think you're doing great. Keep talking and writing about your feelings."

"Thanks for being there, Joleen."

"Any time, Ama." Ama could tell her aunt was smiling. "Now you get some sleep, OK?"

Ama smiled, too. "OK, Joleen. Good night."

Think About It

What are Ama's biggest worries? Do you think other teenagers feel this way, too? How did talking to Joleen help? Who are the people in your life you can talk to?

Will I always feel like this?

TJ and Ama have a lot in common. Although they may look different, at times they both feel awkward, confused or lonely. When they talk to someone who really listens, TJ and Ama learn to feel good about themselves inside and out!

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